



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### **Fish and Wildlife Service**

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Georgia Parham 202-208-5634

#### **AGREEMENT SETS TIMEFRAME FOR PROTECTING RARE PLANTS AND ANIMALS**

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced it has reached out of court settlement of a case involving the agency's procedures to reduce the backlog of plants and animals awaiting listing decisions under the Endangered Species Act. The settlement agreement was reached with The Fund for Animals, Defenders of Wildlife, In Defense of Endangered Species, and other individuals.

The agreement supports the Service's existing priority system which ranks at-risk, candidate species based on the degree of threat faced by each candidate, as well as the taxonomic rarity of a species.

"This agreement essentially gives a seal of approval to the Service's existing method for setting priorities for these species in need of protection," said John Turner, Service Director.

Under the agreement, and based on the existing priority system, the Service will decide whether to propose for listing approximately 400 "category 1" candidate plants and animals over the next four years. Category 1 species are those for which the best scientific information supports listing but, due to other demands, the Service has been unable to develop a listing proposal. Those species with the highest priority will be proposed first.

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The Service has agreed to decide whether to propose for listing approximately 95 category 1 candidate species each year through September 1996, a commitment comparable with the past two years, when the Service proposed 215 plants and animals and listed 144. In addition, the Service is to report annually on its progress through 1997.

The agreement also formalizes a Service commitment to emphasize, where possible, multiple species listings or proposals that address entire ecosystems, instead of a species-by-species approach. In addition to being more cost-effective, these methods allow the Service to focus on the needs of plant and animal communities as a whole, not individually.

Species petitioned for listing, that are determined by the Service to be warranted for listing but precluded by species currently of higher priority, will be classified only as category 1 species, instead of category 1 or 2. Category 2 candidates are those for which insufficient information exists to conclude that listing is warranted but continued monitoring will be carried out.

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